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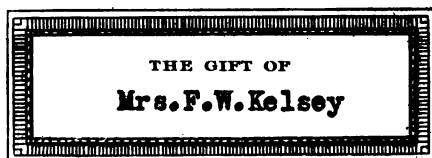
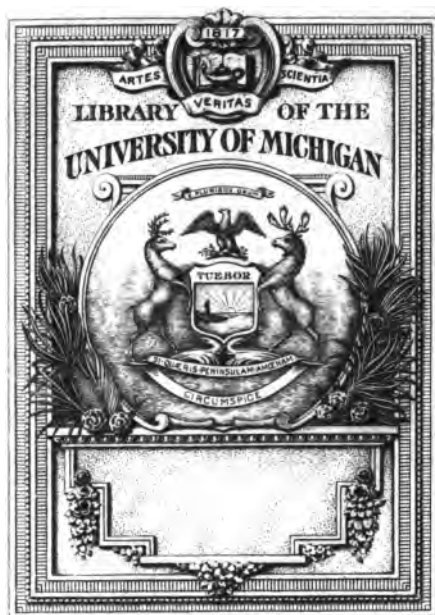
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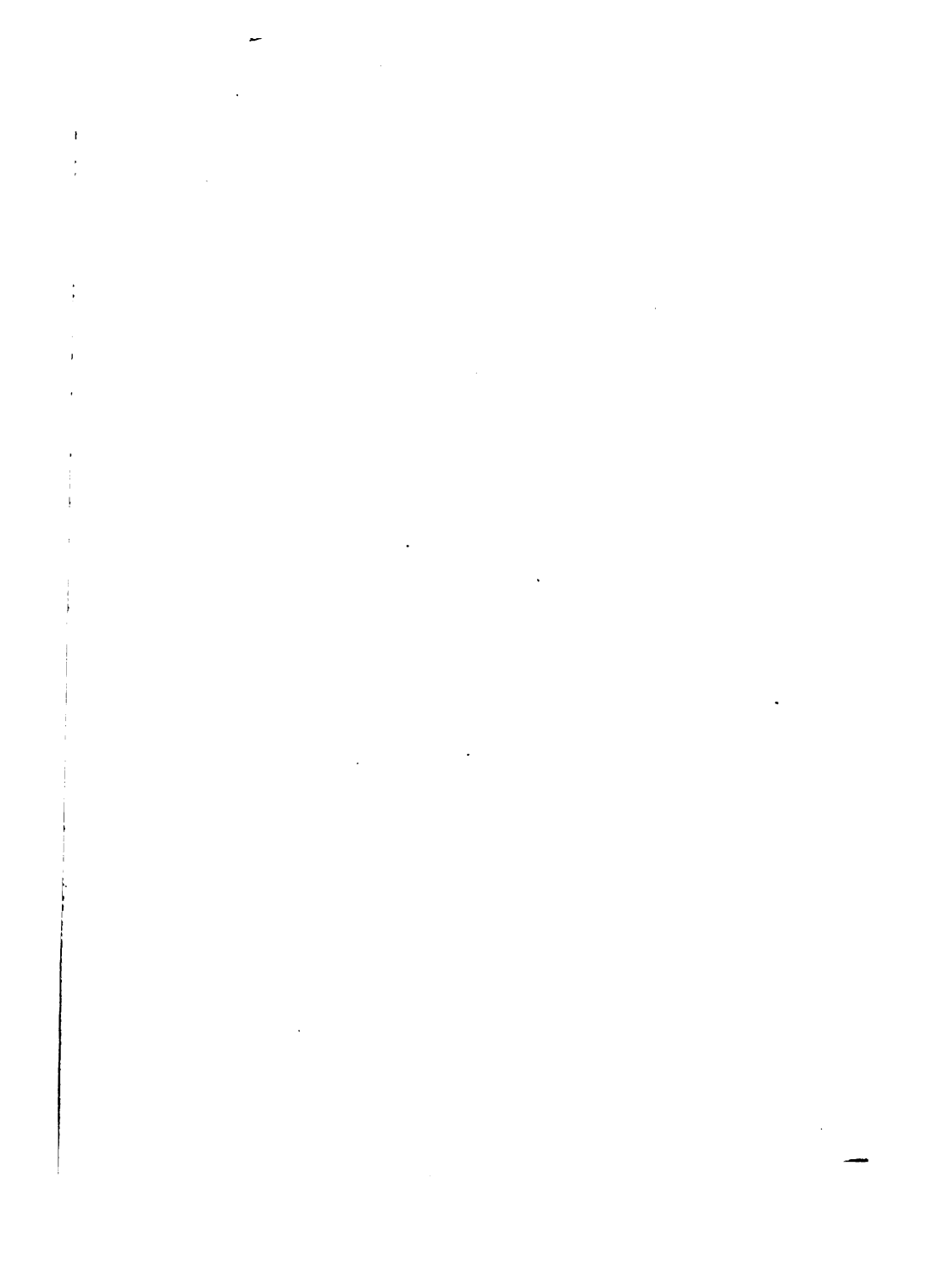
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1896




THE
IDEA OF GOD



BY
DR. PAUL CARUS

FOURTH EDITION, REVISED AND ENLARGED

CHICAGO
THE OPEN COURT PUBLISHING COMPANY
(LONDON: 17 Johnson's Court, Fleet St., E. C.)
1896



THIS essay was read as a paper before the Society for Ethical Culture of Chicago in 1888. The first and second editions preserved the exact form of the original lecture. The third and fourth editions were slightly altered. Some corrections appear on pages 7-9 concerning the etymologies of the words "God" and "Jahveh," and further explanations are added (on pp. 20-24 and 30) in recapitulating the main idea of the subject.

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THE IDEA OF GOD.

THE word God is one of the most wonderful expressions in our language. Its etymology has long been a puzzle to philologists. Its history is shrouded in obscurity. And although it is mostly employed in a vague and ambiguous sense, the meaning of the word, its scope and contents have exercised the greatest influence upon the development of humanity.

I. THE NATURE OF IDEAS.

A word consists of two things: First, a sound, and second, an idea. The sound is used as a symbol of the idea. The sound is the body and the idea is the soul and life of the word. A word without an idea is "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal," and an idea which is not embodied in the sound of a word is like the evanescent spectre of a wraith haunting our diseased imagination, too volatile for a real existence.

Sounds are vibrations of air which we perceive by the ear as a revelation of something that appeals to us,—of something that tells upon us and communicates with us.

Everything around us is productive of sounds. Let the air stir, and it will gently blow in the zephyr or howl in the storm. The trees, moved by the winds, rustle. The wood in our cottages or houses when exposed to a change in temperature creaks and warps with an odd noise. Every bird has its peculiar song and every animal has its cry, which is modulated according to the situation, expressive of all kinds of sen-

J. W. K.

timent and desire. But whatever communication the songs of birds and the cries of animals convey, they do not express ideas and are at the same time more or less inarticulate.

Man is the only animal whose language is articulate, and expressive of ideas. Man's language thus becomes *speech*.

Ideas are the life-blood of what is human in man; they nourish his intellectual and emotional faculties. Without ideas, no thought, and without thought man would be a brute. Ideas make, of his conduct, ethics, and, of his perception, science.

What then is an idea and what is its history and development?

The word *idea* is derived from the Greek *εἶδος*, a picture or image. Plato was the first to use it in a philosophical sense. He was aware of the importance and reality of ideas, he attributed to them an existence independent of ourselves and even considered *them* as the prototypes of things.

The ideas in our brains are not, as has been supposed by many philosophers, of transcendental origin. They have been developed by a slow process of interaction between man and his surroundings, between the subject thinking these ideas, and the objects of which these ideas are images.

The *ideal* and the *real* thus stand in a certain opposition. The ideal world (in the proper and original sense of the word, which means pertaining to ideas) is a new creation, a kind of higher nature in the domain of reality. But it must be understood from the beginning that, as *the real* and *the ideal* are not contradictions, they do not exclude each other. The ideal is just as real as any objective thing is, but its reality

is of another kind; it is a sublimated reality which is erected on the domain of vegetative animal life as an intellectual empire of a grander growth and with higher, nobler aims.

Our ideas are we ourselves; they form the reasoning and thinking man, and the empire of ideas is humanity. The ideal element raises man above the animal and makes him the master of the earth. Yet, it is nothing supernatural or transcendental; it is a sublimation of the natural reflexes produced in us by our reaction upon surrounding objects.

The history of the ideas which make up our individual existence is older than we ourselves. It commenced long before our birth, for it is the history of humanity. And the history of humanity is even older than humanity; for the history of humanity begins with the first living protoplasm upon earth. All the struggles and efforts of our ancestral amoebas are preserved in *us* and form a part of our present existence.

The mechanical means by which nature attains to the ideal life as represented on earth in humanity, is the development of certain forms of organic structures. The living matter of protoplasm suffers a slow combustion resulting from a combination of oxygen with particles of its substance. It attracts new substance for the continuation of the combustion, and covering itself under the influence of surrounding conditions with a membrane, the protoplasm forms cells, which grow and divide into new cells. The form of life which these cells acquire, continues the same in all the cells into which they divide. Every struggle which is experienced, every effort which is made, has a certain effect upon the form of life; it leaves a trace

which somehow molds the living substance, and is in some way, however dimly, recorded. All the activity of our ancestors is thus registered in the structures of our body, and thus our ideas become a great store of intellectual energy gathered through innumerable generations.

This truth of the unity of life on earth admonishes us to be careful in all we say and do—nay even in what we think. Our actions, our words and our thoughts will live after us, and it will take a certain and equivalent amount of good thoughts to counteract the evil effect of bad thoughts. Every bad action, word or thought retards, every good one enhances the future of humanity in working out superior forms of life-structures exhibiting nobler souls and thinking grander ideas.

Not all ideas are images of reality. Many of them are mirages or visionary phantasms which our lively imagination shapes from the hazy mists of error and illusion. The birth of such bugbears in the human mind has always been attended with all sorts of evil consequences. The errors in our minds are worse than illness in our body; as Marcus Aurelius says: "Dost thou think that a false opinion has less power than the bile in the jaundiced, or the poison in him who is bitten by a mad dog?"

It is my object in this essay to investigate whether the idea of God is a truth, or an hallucination of the human mind.

The idea of God is the grandest thought which in ages past humanity ventured to think. Shall we faithfully retain it as a sacred inheritance, or shall we discard it as a fallacy of former times? Perhaps we may be able to do both, to keep what is good and

true, and to rid our minds of what is false and detrimental in the conception of God. Perhaps there is a grand truth at the bottom of this idea, but it is mixed with injurious errors; if so, we shall purify it, and the idea of God will be greater, sublimer and more awe-inspiring to future generations than it ever was to our ancestors.

II. THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE WORD GOD.

The word "God" is of Teutonic origin. Accordingly, it is an offshoot of pagan thought and not Christian or Jewish. The word "God" was used among our forefathers, although in a neuter gender and not as a proper name (see p. 7), long before Ulfilas preached the gospel to the Goths and long before Pope Leo III. sent his missionaries to the Anglo-Saxons; and it was used in distinction from the gods whom the Teutons called Ases.

The Ases were Wodan and Hertha, Thor or Donar, Ziu, Fro and Freia, Baldur, Loki and others. They were looked upon as powerful and active presences, each of them having a distinct character. But these gods were mortal like men and were going to die on the great doomsday of the world. Above these gods ruled Alfadur, who was the real God, who, it was hoped, would restore the world from its ruin, and who would from the ashes of its conflagration create a new earth and a new heaven.

The popular etymology connects the word *God* with the adjective *good*. Both words are spelt alike in Anglo-Saxon; but this is a poor evidence, which must be dropped because the other Teutonic languages indicate that the words *God* and *good* have no etymological relation whatever. They must have been derived from different roots.

Besides it would be an unparalleled exception in folk lore to characterize the nature of a deity as goodness. It is quite a modern idea to reverence a god for his beneficence and it is therefore not probable that the old Teutons should have been so different from other nations.

Not much more plausible is the derivation of the word God from Odhin or Wodan, who in some German dialects was also called Godhin. If this derivation were correct, it would be strange that the word God is used in its different forms as *Got* in old German, *Guth* in Gothic, *God* in Dutch and Anglo-Saxon, *Gudh* or *Godh* in Icelandic, *Gud* in Swedish and Danish. These variations show no correspondence to, or relation with, the different forms of the name *Wodan*, which is *Wōdan* in Saxon, *Wuotan* in Old High German, *Wēda* in Friesish, and *Odhinn* in Icelandic.

The Persian word *khodd*, lord, master, has been suggested as a clue to the name of God, but this word is only preserved in the Zend *quadata* and the Hindoo *khudd*. If it existed in the Teutonic languages, it was early lost, which leaves little probability that the term God originated from this root.

The same objection can be made to another derivation from the Sanskrit *Gudha*, secret.

Some philologists connect the Gothic *Guth* (*God*) with the Gothic verb *guthan* (German *giessen*, to pour forth), and suggest that according to this etymology the original meaning of God may be that of a source from which all life springs. This etymology however is as little satisfactory as that from good, or that from Wodhan. It is artificial and improbable.

Yet the word *guthan* has a specified meaning. Like its Greek analogue *χέειν* (to shed, to pour) it

means to spend, to offer, to bring sacrifice. "The root *ghu*," says Kluge in his latest (4th) edition of the "Etimologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache," p. 119, "corresponding to Sanscrit *hu* means to invoke the Gods, (participle *huta*). God in its original neuter word-form is 'the being invoked.' In the Veda, Indra has the usual appellative *puruhûta* which means 'the much invoked.'" Thus "God" would signify in its etymological meaning that being who is or who is to be worshipped, who is or is to be sacrificed to, who receives or should receive offerings.

* * *

Our etymologists who had so much trouble at home, encounter less difficulty with the names of God in other languages. The root of the Latin, *deus*, Greek *θεός*, akin to the Persian *deva*, and to the Greek, *Zeús*, (*Διός*), and the Latin, *dies*, day; *diespiter* or *Diupiter*, *Jupiter*, (viz.: father of the day,) means bright, radiant, light.

The Persian *Ormuzd* (Ahura-Mazda) means 'the wise lord'; and it is significant of Hindoo piety that *Brahma* means 'prayer, devotion.' Other Indian names of God are *Brahmapati*, lord of prayer, *Prajapati*, lord of creatures, *Visva karman*, all-doer.

The Hebrew, *El*, *Eli*, and *Elohim* (the same as the Mohammedan *Alla*) means the strong or the mighty one. *Elohim* is a plural form, but it does not therefore, as has been supposed, denote a plurality of gods. *Elohim* is always used as a singular form and has its verb following in the singular. The Hebrew use the plural form as a singular, to denote abstracts. *Elohim* accordingly should be translated godhead or deity.

The other old Hebrew name *Zebaoth* is likewise such a plural form, derived from *Zabha* star. It means the godhead of the starry heavens.

The name *Jehovah* was introduced, according to Scriptures, by Moses. The ancient Jews derived it from *hajah*, "to be, or to live," so that it would mean "the Eternal One." This conception has been embodied in the old Mosaic words with which Jehovah characterises himself "I am that I am," and has thus become so popular with us that we involuntarily identify the ideas Godhood and Eternity, recognising in Eternity the most characteristic divine feature.

The word *Jehovah* does not possess its own vowels. This was brought about by the Mosaic injunction: "Thou shalt not use the name of thy God in vain." By a slight change of meaning, the verb "to use in vain" signified, a few centuries after Moses, "to use." The ancient Jews now interpreted the law in the sense: "Thou shalt not use the name of thy God at all." Wherever the name *Jhv̄h* appeared the Jews said Adonaj, i. e. my Lord. In the original Hebrew texts the consonants only were written and when long afterwards the vowels were added by the rabbis, they placed the vowels of *ādonaj*—viz. (1) *sh'va*, (2) *o*, and (3) *a*—under the consonants *J, h, v, h*, so as to read *J'hovah*.

The etymology of *Jahveh* from *hajah*, "to be," although it was current among the ancient Jews, is now, mainly for linguistic reasons, rejected as untenable. The similarities of sound that have been discovered in the Roman *Jovis* (genitive of *Jupiter*) and the Egyptian *Iao* or *I-ha-ho** with *Javeh* are incidental. What, then, is the original significance of the name?

Professor Cornill recognises in the Biblical description of *Jahveh* a thunder-god, and derives the name from an old Semitic verb, *havah*, to fall, which in Arabic has still preserved its original meaning. The word

* Suggested by Schiller in his article *Die Sendung Moses*.

accordingly means "he who makes fall," or "he who overthrows," viz., with thunderbolts. Jahveh was, according to Professor Cornill, the deity who resided on Mount Sinai, manifesting himself in thunder-storms. This agrees well with the Biblical tradition that Moses adopted the name while staying in the desert with Jethro, the priest of Midian, whose influence upon Moses appears to have been very great.*

The early Christians, ignorant of the fact that the word Jehovah was a combination of the consonants of *Jahveh* and the vowels of *ädonaj*, pronounced it as it was spelt and thus gave currency to this absurd formation of the word, which since then has often been repeated by human lips in devout prayer and adoration.

III. GOD AN ABSTRACT IDEA.

A clergyman and a lawyer once became engaged in a hot dispute concerning the nature of God; the former said that God exists, and promised to prove it from the order of the universe and the wonders of creation, while the latter said that God does not exist, and he also agreed to prove his statement by the absurdity of such an idea. A personal God, he declared, is an impossibility and a self-contradiction. A merchant who was listening to their arguments, was called upon to decide. The lawyer as well as the clergyman were good customers of his, and the merchant had upon other occasions privately assented to either view. Now he was caught in a difficult dilemma, and for fear he might lose the patronage of either, he said: "I should say that the truth lies exactly in the middle."

*Professor Cornill is one of the very best authorities on Hebrew literature. See his fascinating book, *The Prophets of Israel*. Sketches from Old Testament History. The Open Court Publishing Co. 1895.

Perhaps this man is right after all; the truth lies in the middle. Only it is a pity that the middle between 'yes' and 'no' cannot be found by a simple calculation of the extreme and mean ratio. If we know that the truth does indeed lie in the middle between 'yes' and 'no,' this solution offers a new problem, viz., in what sense does God exist and in what sense does God not exist?

In the attempt at answering this question we do not mean to shirk the truth. We do not intend to make concessions to either party, but shall go to the bottom of the problem.

We can expect to reach a final decision only by the application of radical thoroughness. This method places us between the two parties as an umpire; but there is little hope that we shall please either, for our verdict will most likely be that both are in the wrong.

The history of the idea of God is lost in dark antiquity. In historic ages we find it connected with all that is great and sublime, and it has at the same time served as a pretext for committing crimes of oppression and injustice. The idea of God is the cornerstone of the Platonic, Aristotelean, and of the Neo-Platonic philosophies. Warriors used the word as a battle cry, martyrs died with it on their lips, and millions of people were comforted in misery by the thought of God. All of them thought of God as a great person, the creator of the world or a good philanthropic master of our fates.

Ideas are either concrete or abstract. We call them concrete, if they are images of things. A chair, a table, a tree, a dog, are concrete ideas; they are generalizations of all the chairs, tables, trees and dogs we have ever seen. Abstract ideas are of a later growth.

Whiteness, goodness, courage, virtue, are abstracts. We notice the whiteness of the snow, the whiteness of a lily and of many other objects. The color red being often observed, is recognized again as soon as our eye meets with a red object. Thus it happens that the notion of red which we acquired by seeing red blood, the red dawn of the morning, red roses, etc., forms an independent conception in our mind, as undoubtedly it is also localized in certain relatively independent cells of our brain which are excited as often as red is perceived.

Abstract ideas were considered in olden times as real things. The Greeks thought of virtue or *ἀρετή*, as a beautiful virtuous woman, and as the gender follows the sex, *ἀρετή*, is feminine. Gender in all our modern languages is a remnant of this personal view of ideas. The English language is most advanced in development, for it has gotten rid of this infantile mode of expression.

The idea of God, if it signifies anything, is an abstract idea and not a concrete one. Is it any more than natural that at an early period of human development the idea of God was personified as a powerful man, a creator and ruler, the judge of right or wrong? This phase of the idea of God was just as necessary as the phase of a personification of virtue and vice. In consideration of the fact that it is only a few centuries since philosophy freed itself from the old view according to which ideas are things, it is not to be wondered at that this phase of a belief in a personal God has not yet passed away. It will take some time, but it is certain that it will pass away, and later generations will smile at the paganism of our present ecclesiastical view as we smile at the ingenuous belief

of the ancients in the Deities, Virtue, Wisdom and Beauty, as Arete, Athene and Aphrodite.

We can no more doubt that the ancients virtually believed in the real and objective existence of such deities, and whoever from his modern standpoint, cannot understand this psychological state of mind, should study the religious views of a devout Catholic from the interior of Poland or Ireland, who believes in all the archangels and saints without having the slightest doubt that they are live presences hovering somewhere above him in the air.

Even more cultured people of the present time believe in the personal existence of abstracts, and those who believe will easily find occasion to communicate with them. I received a few days ago a letter from a well educated American clergyman who professes to believe in good and evil angels, messengers from heaven and creators of discord. Who, under the evidence of such facts, can doubt that the ancients literally believed in their mythological deities?

The prologue to the Reformation was a contest between the schoolmen as to whether ideas were *things* or *names*. This contest was decided in favor of those who declared that ideas had an objective existence, that they were real things. The Nominalists, who said that ideas are names, were worsted and persecuted, but by and by their views developed a philosophy which was consummated and perfected in the eighteenth century by one of the greatest thinkers of all times, by Immanuel Kant.

Kant wrote a book, "The Critique of Pure Reason," in which he explains that our concepts are representations of things, our ideas are noumena or thoughts, and our concepts do not possess reality in

the sense which we usually attribute to reality; they are ideal, i. e., they are concepts. Of reality Kant says, as an explanation of the term in the narrower sense in which he uses it: "We can be conscious of nothing as real, except a sensation (*Wahrnehmung*) and the empirical progression from it to other possible sensations. For phenomena as mere conceptions (*Vorstellungen*) are real only by sensation. And sensation is, in fact, nothing but the reality of an empirical conception, that is a phenomenon. To call a phenomenon a real thing prior to sensation, means either that we must meet with this phenomenon in the progress of experience or it means nothing at all."

Shall we ever meet in our experience with God as a phenomenon? Certainly not. God is according to Kant no phenomenon, but a noumenon, a thought, an idea, and it is undoubtedly an abstract idea. Kant boldly drew the last consequence of Nominalism, he declared ideas to be names and God he called a noumenon, a thought of our mind.

Did Kant state that God does not exist? By no means; he simply proved—and he proved it beyond a doubt, by arguments which have been accepted even by orthodox Theology—that God is a noumenon. But at the same time he declared in his "Critique of Practical Reason," that God is a Noumenon *which we must of necessity conceive*; God's existence cannot be proved, but the idea of God, he said, is a *postulate* of practical reason.

In Kant the development of the idea of God reached its climax. The battle about it is long since decided, and yet such is the complexity of the subject that now a century after Kant the general confusion is not yet cleared up. Philosophers of lesser pene-

tration are fighting in the dark, the zealous iconoclasts on the one side, and ingenuous pagans under the modern name of orthodox Christians on the other. The hazy mist of their misconceptions concerning the nature of ideas, which surrounds both parties, will perhaps settle under the influence of a brighter morning and then they will see that they have been fighting about a word, and that, in their quarrel about the name, they quite forgot the idea of the word.

IV. THE CONCEPTIONS OF GOD.

The idea of God is so variously defined that we make bold to say that every single individual has a conception of his own. There are no two alike, and the idea of God among different persons is indicative of their character, for every man creates his God in his own image.

There was a brave officer in the Austrian army under Prince Eugene. When once in his presence the problem of God's existence was discussed, he clapped his hand on his sword and said: "Gentlemen, I stand up for God with my sword, I challenge whoever denies him and, so help me God, I'll conquer him. I hope that God will stand up for me, too, on the day of judgment."

The God of this gallant man is, like unto himself, a gentleman, who, I hope, will not disappoint the expectation of his friend on the day of judgment.

Although we have seen that God is an abstract idea and a noumenon, this idea nevertheless possesses for the life of every individual a powerful reality. *Every* idea possesses in the realm of the human mind a reality. One idea influences the others, and such a central idea as that of God is generally dominant over our whole conduct and exercises a directive agency in the development of our lives.

The conceptions of God have been grouped according to fundamental characteristics under certain headings. We speak of Polytheism, of Pantheism, of Monotheism, of Theism, of Deism, and of Atheism.

The oldest view of civilized mankind is Polytheism, or the belief in many gods. Polytheism is the religion of the ancient Greeks in Homer's time, and of the Hindoos about 1000 B. C. Polytheism conceives of ideas as personages, it fancies to hear a thunderer in the thunder and a divine driver in the chariot of the sun. Polytheism is preceded by a state which Max Müller calls Henotheism (single-godedness) a view which deifies single things, such as have a mysterious influence upon ourselves, springs, rivers, mountains, trees, etc. Henotheism is based on the conception so natural with mankind in its childhood, that our environment is alive like ourselves—not only alive in the broader sense of possessing self-motion, but in the narrower sense of being psychically animated. This henotheism must be distinguished from fetishism, which is a worship of idols. Fetishism is common among savage tribes and characterizes a degeneration of the religious sentiment, while henotheism, in spite of many similarities to fetishism, must be regarded as the promising dawn of a brighter morning.

Polytheism is alive still. The belief in saints and martyrs, madonnas, angels and devils, is only an ecclesiastic Polytheism, a true paganism in Christian disguise.

Polytheism naturally develops into Monotheism. All the diverse gods are recognized as one and the same. And this 'one and the same' is considered as the almighty author of the phenomena in the world. Monotheism, accordingly, is the belief that there is but one

God, and this one God is a personal deity with passions and emotion like ourselves.

Monotheism is not exclusively a Jewish or Christian idea. In Grecian history its time was shortly before and during the prime of Athens. It prevailed among the Israelites from Moses to Christ, and it was but natural that in such a time all interest was absorbed by the idea of God and that the loftiest emotions took the shape of worship.

During the period of monotheism, God became the main problem of philosophy. Dionysius, the ruler of Syracuse, asked one of the sages of Greece "What is God?," and the philosopher requested one day for consideration. On the next day he demanded two days more. He shut himself up in his room and was engaged in deep meditation. When the term had elapsed, he wished for another respite, and this time of three days more. Dionysius grew impatient, but the philosopher declared that the longer he pondered upon the subject, the obscurer and the profounder a mystery it seemed to become.

The Christian church adopted monotheism, although it accepted at the same time the Indian Trinity of the godhead.

Monotheism developed naturally out of a preceding Polytheism, and in the course of time the problem of Monotheism 'what is God?' was answered by bold philosophers: God is no person like ourselves, God is the world and the world is God. This view which identified the All and God is called Pantheism.

Monotheism is dualistic, as it believes in a God above nature. Pantheism is the beginning of Monism. The system of Spinoza is Pantheism, and the poetic and philosophic grandeur of his view exerted its power like a magic charm upon humanity.

Monotheism was greatly affected by the strong influence of Pantheism. A deity above nature, a supernatural God in the old sense had become impossible. Theology had to change some fundamental conceptions of its personal God, and the result was a differentiation into two views, *Theism* and *Deism*. Deism was the belief of the enlightened eighteenth century, of a Voltaire and a Rousseau in France, of a Shaftesbury in England, and of a Lessing in Germany.

The deist believes in a personal God as the creator of the world; but the deistic God is different from that of Monotheism. Since miracles become impossible, he no longer interferes with the laws of nature.

Theism is the more orthodox view. Theism only purifies the idea of God from the crudest anthropomorphic traits and declares that God as the creator of the world exists in his works as well as distinct from them. Natural laws and miracles are both the expression of his will; as a monarch may issue general laws and special orders.

In all fundamental points the God of Theism and of Deism remains the same as that of Monotheism. All three views consider God a transcendental and supernatural person, although we may fairly acknowledge that the systems which are presented under the name of Theism are often philosophically more elaborated than others.

Atheism was formed in opposition to all these views. The transition from Theism to Atheism is Agnosticism, which teaches that there is something unknowable in or behind nature, and this unknowable is God, or, as Agnostics say, 'the cause and source of all phenomena.'

Atheism is the most modern conception of God

but hardly the last one. Atheism cannot stand, for it is no positive view; it is negative and exists only as a criticism of the other conceptions. Atheism does not declare what it believes, but what should not be believed. It was developed from Pantheism, and is an outcome of the materialistic philosophy. Atheism rejects the idea of considering the universe as God, since materialism maintains that the universe consists of matter only, and matter cannot be an object of reverence or worship. Pantheism, the Atheists declare, leads astray, and conveys, if it means anything at all, the phantastic conception of a world-soul; and such a view is just as false as monotheism or polytheism.

And certainly atheism is right in so far as it criticizes all the previous views of God and finds them to be wanting. Have we, then, to be content with this view and rest satisfied in this negative result?

V. DEFINITION OF THE IDEA OF GOD.

Let us see, whether there is any truth at all in the idea of God, and whether, as Atheism declares, the belief in God was merely a heavy dream of humanity, the nightmare of a childish imagination.

God is an abstract and we have learned that abstract ideas are none the less true and real, although they are no concrete things such as chairs, tables, trees and dogs.

The idea of goodness or virtue does not exist as a beautiful woman in the shape of a spirit-being, but so long as there live and aspire virtuous men and women, virtue exists and is no mere illusion or product of imagination. Virtue exists in the virtuous and the idea of virtue is a live presence which should not be blotted out from the ideal domain of the human mind.

Is it not exactly the same with the idea of God? Certainly, a supernatural being, all-wise and almighty, all-present and eternal, and at the same time limited to the personal existence of an ego like a mortal man—such a deity does not exist. But as virtue exists in the virtuous, is there nothing divine in nature and in man in which the presence of God can be found as an actual reality? Surely God exists as certain as virtue and other abstract ideas exist; but God will remain a mystery as long as our minds are fettered with the pagan notion that God is a concrete thing or a phenomenon. We shall understand God better if we take God to be what Kant calls a noumenon, an idea.

The content of this idea has been defined differently. God was called by Matthew Arnold "the power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness." But why does Arnold exclude ourselves from God? Is there nothing divine in us? We should correct Arnold's expression into "the power that makes for righteousness, which is manifest in nature as well as in humanity *and* ourselves."

J. R. Seeley finds God in the Unity of Nature, in the harmonious order to which every one has to conform under the penalty of penance.

It would lead me too far here, if I were to advance my objections to Matthew Arnold's as well as to Seeley's conception. Both are the most progressive theologians I could take hold of, but both are not yet fully free from the monotheistic conception and the idea of a supernatural deity.

Seeley speaks of the Laws of Nature as being God's laws. But God is to him the broader concept, "since God includes nature." A God who is within nature

but also outside nature, remains after all supernatural. Nature is, so to say, God's activity. That part of God which is supposed to be outside of nature, would be inactive. It would be redundant and being without efficacy, it would be non-existent.

The same must be said in much stronger words about Fiske's view, who sees in the 'dramatic tendency of the universe' a multiform manifestation of 'the Infinite power.' Fiske rejects the Theism of Paley, but goes so far as to attribute to his own God psychological attributes, although disclaiming the word anthropomorphic.

Yet all these views mark a progress ; all are at least not quite unsuccessful efforts to establish a positive statement of what the idea of God will be in the future.

* * *

If we could make of the innumerable God-ideas in the minds of men a composite photograph, such as Galton made of certain classes of faces, we should find in all of them one feature most prominently present : God is to everybody who believes in a God the ultimate authority in conformity to which he regulates his conduct. In accord with this fact, we may say that everyone who somehow regulates his actions, recognises such an authority, or in other words, believes in a God.

There are Gods of all kind, and many of these deities would with a wider range of knowledge soon be recognised as demons of evil. To one that which affords pleasure is God, while another one perhaps worships the golden calf of the money power of the marts. But to him who has rent the veil of Maya, who has recognised the illusion of individual existence, who

knows that he is a part of that soul-life which appears upon earth in humanity, that he is a phase of this life, that his soul with its mentality, intelligence, and aspirations has been transmitted to him from the generations of the past and will continue in future generations, who knows that his brother-man, to the same extent as his ideas and ideals are the same, also possesses the same soul, that his brother is an *alter ego*, another himself, of whom the Buddhists say *tat twan asi* (i. e. that art thou),—to him who has recognised this and who acts accordingly, a man who by resigning his sham individuality enters the nirvana of immortal life: to him God is that power which makes morality possible, God is the sum total of all the conditions which have produced man as a living, thinking, and aspiring being, God is the authority whom man must obey in order to live and to progress, in whom man has to trust for the preservation of his soul beyond the grave.

Says Goethe:

" There is a Universe, also, within,
And hence the good old custom did begin
That everyone on the best of what he knows
The name of God, yea of *his* God, bestows.
With Heaven and earth he'll Him endue,
Fears Him, if possible, loves Him too."

*" Im Innern ist ein Universum auch ;
Daher der Völker löblicher Gebrauch,
Dass jeglicher das Beste, was er kennt,
Er Gott, ja seinen Gott benennt,
Ihm Himmel und Erden übergiebt,
Ihn fürchtet, und wo möglich liebt."*

It is true and very well expressed that we first fear our God, and obey him because we fear him. But if

he be the right God we shall learn to love him. We must try to love him, for if we do love him, obedience will be easy ; says the apostle St. John : " For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous."

Goethe's poem makes the impression that God is a mere subjective picture of our imagination. But that was neither Goethe's view, as I understand him, nor is it the view of God maintained here. God is a real objective existence and our God-idea can be a more or less perfect representation of God. Similarly the law of gravitation is a thought-construction of our mind, a subjective representation, an idea, but it describes real facts : gravitation itself is a reality.

* * *

Having spoken of the veil of Maya, I feel urged to add a few words about Buddhism. Buddhism was the first great revelation of the illusive existence of the ego,* but Buddhism failed to solve the religious problem of mankind because it represented the resignation of the ego as an annihilation. Buddhism became pessimism. It was the great work of Christianity to emphasise that the recognition of the sham existence of the ego is actually a recognition of immortality.

That which is real and permanent in an individual is the humanity of his soul. The language of man is the expression of a common life, and in the same way all the mental structures of a human soul are traces of a common activity. Soul-life is communal ; it originated by communication and exists in the communism

* See *Homilies of Science*, the article "Enter into Nirvana," p. 121, and "The Religion of Resignation," p. 143.

of social exchange. Man's soul is the mental interchange of mankind incorporated in an individual organism, and while the individual organism will die, the soul continues to live. There is no death in the sense of extermination. All our ancestors live in us, their souls are with us and will remain with us even unto the end of the world. And so we shall live even though the body die.

It appears to be of great importance to understand rightly the positive aspect of soul-life. The negative aspect depresses without elevating ; the positive aspect elevates without depressing. The negative aspect destroys man's activity, the positive raises it upon a higher level. The former leads to stagnation, the latter to progress, the former is a peculiar kind of atheism : the authority for the regulation of conduct leads to the annihilation of life ; the latter is based upon a belief in God as that power which is the life of our life.

Science will in its further progress more and more enlighten and deepen our views of God, but no critique of science can ever destroy this conception, for it describes God as certain facts of nature that can be investigated, that can be verified by experience and formulated with scientific exactness. These facts of nature exist as sure as we ourselves exist. These facts are the principle of the cosmic development of solar systems in the starry heavens and also of organised life upon earth ; these facts are the cause of man's progress and the basis of ethics. They are the ultimate authority from which all the rules have been derived that are called ethical precepts or moral commands, and with which to remain in conformity is the highest ideal of man. We may call these facts the ethical life of nature or the moral law of the universe,

but in so far as they are the authority in obedience to which we regulate our conduct they are God.

This conception of God contains all that is true in the old views and is at the same time free from any supernaturalism and anthropomorphism. It is indeed the old conception of God, only purified by critique, for we cannot better and more concisely describe the nature of God than with the words of the apostle as being He, in whom we live and move and have our being.

This conception of God is not the iconoclasm of the infidel, it is the purest and holiest faith of the believer. Yet at the same time it is not the superstition of the credulous fanatic, of the bigot, it is the outcome of the most radical freethought and of unflinching criticism.

This view of God is more than an idea, it is an ideal. An ideal is an idea that is an aim for our aspiration. An ideal is a living idea, i. e., an idea which can constantly be more and more realised and always admits of still greater perfection.*

* * *

The solution of the problem of God, in this sense, will be satisfactory only to few—to those few who take an impartial view of the subject and who are not embittered by the prevailing strife and hatred of parties.

Those engaged in the strife either will denounce me as an atheist, because I say 'God is not a person

* For further explanations of the author's views of the conception of God, see *Fundamental Problems*, pp. 49, 151-153, and also in the appendix of the second edition of the same book, pp. 261 and 322. *The Soul of Man*, pp. 367-369 and 437-446. *The Ethical Problem*, pp. 20-22. *Homilies of Science*, the chapters on God and World, pp. 75-120.

like ourselves,' or the opposite party will decry me as a reactionary believer and an inconsistent thinker, because I say 'there is some truth in our old religious views, but it is mixed with errors.'

I shall answer to the former that concerning the idea of God I have rejected the pagan and superstitious conceptions only, viz., anthropomorphism and supernaturalism; I have retained all that is true, and great, and beautiful. If the purification of our ideals is atheism, let us embrace the name and be proud of it.

I shall answer to the latter that the iconoclast lacks in radical thoroughness and consistency. If the idea of God is an empty dream which we must expel from our minds, why not expel all ideas and all ideals? They are just as much and just as little real. And if virtue, duty, hope, scientific formulae, and artistic conceptions have no reality, then, the sublimated reality of an ideal existence is naught, and the only possible reality is animal life. From this point of view a denial of the existence of God would with consistency lead us also to a denial of an integral, or a logarithm, or a differential. An integral is just as little a concrete object as is God. And the idea of God is just as important in the real life of human activity, human thought and emotion, as the idea of honesty is in the mercantile world, that of courage among warriors, or that of truth in science.

It follows from this that we would do better to use the word God in the neuter sense, saying that *it* is the moral life in nature. This may seem objectionable to many and yet it is a truism which was known thousands of years ago. God is neither man nor woman; yet he is manliness in man and womanhood in woman.

If we speak of God in the personal form as *he*, this is a usage of our language not different from that of speaking of the sun as *he*, and the moon as *she*. There is no necessity for discarding this usage, if we are conscious of the simile, which is very appropriate when accepted in this sense. Christ did so; he spoke of God as his father. Men are the children of God inasmuch as humanity is a product of the ethical life of nature. When Christ was asked where that father is and how he happened to know him, he answered: "I and the father are one." Man is the incarnation of the ethical life of nature. Man and God are one. Christ acknowledges the fact, and my whole essay tends to prove the truth that true humanity is divinity, and divinity is no unknowable being in wonderland, divinity is true humanity, divinity is the ethical life in nature and the ideal of perfection in man.

VI. ENTHEISM THE MONISTIC CONCEPTION OF GOD.

Our view of God is not theism, not pantheism and not atheism. It does not teach that God is a person above the world, nor does it identify God with nature, nor does it deny God's existence altogether. If our view must be labeled and registered among the different 'isms,' I must form a new word and call it *Entheism*, which clearly denotes the conception of a monistic God, who is immanent, not transcendent, who is in many respects different from and superior to nature, yet pervades all nature.

Entheism being at variance with Theism, Pantheism and Atheism in many respects, nevertheless agrees with these views in others; for to some extent they all contain some truth. Entheism agrees with Theism in so far as it recognizes an actual power in nature that makes for righteousness, not only *in* ourselves but

also beyond ourselves. It agrees with Pantheism in so far as its God is a law of Nature. We may call it the highest law of nature which is exactly as omnipresent in the Universe as is for instance the law of gravitation. Accordingly its God is the Cosmos itself, the All, or the totality of the world as an orderly unity. Entheism agrees even with Atheism in so far as it unreservedly accepts the criticisms of the latter on supernaturalism and anthropomorphism. Atheism, it must be confessed, has achieved most for the purification of the conception of God.

One serious question arises: Whether this idea of God may fitly become an object of worship? My answer is:

If worship is taken in the usual sense as an act of adoration, or a submissive cult of self-humiliation, I do not propose to worship God. However, if worship is to signify what it does according to its etymology (Anglo-Saxon *weordhscipe*), considering and bearing in mind the worth of something or of somebody, I do propose to *worthship* God. We should fully appreciate his import for our lives, and for those who shall live after us. Such a worship is one "in spirit and in truth," as is recommended by Christ. It will keep us in harmony with humanity as well as with the cosmical order of the universe. It will not disparage us, but elevate man as the first born son of nature and the legitimate child of God.

The same holds good of prayer. If prayer is a supplication with kneeling down in abject self-humiliation, it is detestable. But if prayer is a severe self-criticism, a moral atonement for trespasses committed and also the strengthening of our moral sense for avoiding errors in the future, if prayer thus keeps us

in unity with God as the moral life of the world, prayer is recommendable.

God—as an object of worship and prayer, as a power who can be influenced by our devotion so as to favor us in this life or in a hereafter,—is an idol, and such a conception of God is pagan, for it is only sublimated fetishism. There is but one worship of God “in spirit and in truth” and that is to do his will. There is but one kind of prayer which is not heathenish, and that prayer is the self-discipline by which we prepare ourselves to do his will. And what else is God’s will than the moral precepts about which there is scarcely any dissent and in which almost all religions and philosophies agree.

Sometimes it may appear that we shall reap great advantages by a violation of these moral laws and that the just will suffer while the sinner is prospering. But although the immoral man may injure or even ruin his righteous neighbor, one thing is sure, and always has remained true, that in the end a violation of the moral laws will never pay. Those who are immoral and act immorally (i. e. those who do not do the will of God) must perish at last. There is no escape from this, for only what harmonizes with the All and what concurs with the order of the Cosmos can survive. A lie may occasionally be profitable, but truth only can stand for good. The immoral man has built on sand and only the house of the moral man stands on a rock. When the rain descends, and the floods come, and the winds blow and beat upon that house, it will not fall, for it is based upon a solid foundation.

If God is an abstract, and not a concrete thing or a person as our forefathers imagined, would it not be better to discard the *word* God altogether and to retain

what is explained as the *idea* of God under such a name as "Morality," or "the Good," or "the Ethical Law," or "the Natural Aspiration for the Ideal?"—Certainly it is advisable to do away with the word God wherever its use is ambiguous. Science can dispense with it, for when science has to deal with what we have defined as the idea of God, a scientific expression, such as is wanted for the occasion, would be preferable. Similarly in Chemistry, the words "salt" and "water" may be used; but their proper terms are ClNa and H_2O .

But if the word God is to be canceled in the domain of science, it need not be thrown aside altogether. It would be ridiculous to dispose of the words salt and water in the same way and substitute in their places H_2O and ClNa . The word God is not a scientific term; it is an expression which for centuries has been connected with the holiest emotions and the most pious apprehensions of humanity. It is a poetic term and an expression of sentiment. Whether such a word is to be discarded from our languages is not a matter which can be decided by philologists. Words if they are expressive have a tenacious life, and ideas if they are true are immortal. If the word God is strongly expressive of what the idea of God in its best sense can mean, it will live in spite of the explanations of atheism. However, if the word God is inseparably interwoven with the errors which, we know, have been connected with the idea of God, it will die, and no power on earth will be able to raise it from the dead. *Our* duty is to eliminate the false notions and to point out the truth which it contains; but *history* will decide its fate.

I know that my view does not agree with many rites and customs of churches and sects; but I am glad



to say it well agrees with Christ's view, who abolished prayer in the sense of begging, and substituted for it a prayer in which Christians no longer ask that *their* will, but that *God's* will be done.*

A peculiar lesson is involved in the fact that Buddhism, the greatest non-Christian religion, which is distinguished for inculcating the noblest moral maxims, such as love of enemies, chastity, sincerity of heart, and charity toward all suffering creatures, knows nothing about God. Unfriendly critics have on that account branded Buddhists as atheists, and yet they face the same facts of life and have derived therefrom the same rules of ethical conduct. The main difference between Christians and Buddhists consists in the employment of different systems of comprehending and symbolising the facts of experience. Both religions, Christianity as well as Buddhism, recognise an authority for moral conduct. The former call it Christ, the latter Buddha. Christ reveals to Christians the will of God; Buddha teaches men enlightenment. There is this difference: that Christ appears as the son of God, and therefore his teachings must be accepted as revealed truth, while Buddha is a man, who after a diligent search at last obtained the highest wisdom, that will deliver mankind from evil. In Christianity the sonship of Christ vouches for the truth of Christ's message, while in Buddhism Buddha's enlightenment constitutes his Buddhahood. Now Buddha teaches that enlightenment is the same, and that all Buddhas teach the same religion, which consists in the abandonment of the vanity of selfhood, of all hatred and envy, and of lust, implying at the same time a far-reaching and unbounded love, which re-

* See *Religion of Science*, pp. 88-89, and *The Open Court*, No. 439, p. 4786.

fuses none, not even those who hate and despise us, compassion with all those that suffer, and holiness. Enlightenment is a living recognition of the truth seen in its moral application to practical life, and truth is a summarised statement of facts, or rather the laws pervading the facts and constituting a comprehensive aspect of their eternity. And this essence of Buddhahood, the eternal laws, the recognition of which constitute enlightenment, has been formulated by the later Buddhists under the name of Amitâbha, which means illimitable light, and is conceived as eternal, immutable, and omnipresent. It is the *Sambhōga-Kāya* (the body of bliss) among the three personalities of Buddha, the other two being the *Nirmāna-Kāya*, the apparitional body of Buddha the teacher, and the *Dharma-Kāya*, the body of the law, which is Buddha's religion in its historical development.*

The facts are the same in Buddhism and in Christianity; the modes only of formulating them in symbolical expressions varies. Both religions recognise an authority of conduct which, in a word, we may call "the ethical law of the universe, as manifested in the evolution of life."

If God manifests himself in the "ethical life of nature," and if ethical life means growth and progress, God is *not* identical with nature nor is he a psychical principle in nature, a kind of world-soul which animates the universe, as the soul, according to the dualistic view, resides in the body. God is not a being, not mind, not a spirit; he is higher than any being, and higher than any person; he is superpersonal. If the cosmos were the handiwork of a world-creator, this world-creator would still be the subject of Amitâbha,

* Compare *The Gospel of Buddha*, pp. 225 et seq.

of the superpersonal God ; * for in creating the world, he would have to conform to him, and in pointing out to man the way of salvation, he could only teach him the eternal truths, from which the unalterable moral injunctions are derived.

This God can, just as well as the law of gravitation, be made an object of our observation and study. God as a law of natural life is recognised in evolution and as a power he is felt in the lives of every single individual as well as in the history of nations. God fought with the small number of Greeks against the numerous hosts of Persians, for in the hearts of the Greeks throbbed love of freedom and noble aspirations for high ideals. God revealed himself in the songs of David and in the dramas of Shakespeare. God lived in the sermon of Luther and in the writings of Lessing. He is a power in the history of mankind irresistible in its manifestations. "In God we trust" for our national development in the United States, and God must be the guiding star, also, of our personal destinies—"the divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will."

God bursts forth in the flowers and fresh verdure of spring ; He inspires all noble emotions of men, the poetry of the poet, and the inquiries of the scientist. Yea, God lives in our very tribulations and afflictions, as mainly through them our nobler nature is aroused. *Per crucem ad lucem.* The cross teaches us the most impressive moral lesson.

Wherever man's self disappears in duty, wherever the authority of conduct, that speaks to us in the experiences of life, has taken possession of the soul,

* See *The Religion of Science*, Second Edition, pp. 22, 111 et seqq. ; *Primer of Philosophy*, pp. 147, 199-203.

wherever passions, vanity, and egotism yield to self-discipline, truth, and love, wherever there is an aspiration onwards to a nobler morality and a higher conception of life, there is God. In this sense we join in the beautiful song :

' Nearer my God to thee,
Nearer to thee,
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me !
Still all my song shall be
Nearer my God to thee,
Nearer to thee.

' Onward our march must be,
Faithful and true !
Nobler humanity
Will us imbue.
No pain nor trouble shun
Sternly our duty done,
Faithful and true !

" Let us all brothers be,
Who lovingly
Join hands in sympathy
God before thee.
This is the way to thee,
Thus we rise constantly,
Nearer to thee."

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